Public Policy Prelim: Spring 2012

Instructions: Answer one question from each part of the examination for a total of three answers. Please identify the question you are answering at the beginning of each essay. You are limited to 3000 words for answering each question.

Strong answers make coherent and forceful arguments, are grounded in scholarly literature, and make use of relevant examples. They show an understanding of current research and issues. Weak answers often fail to make an argument or do so without reference to relevant literature. Exams are graded as a whole; repeating arguments in response to different questions weakens the overall exam.

The exam is due back by 5pm the next day, but an extra 24 hours is allowed for the completed bibliography. Good luck!

Part I: General Public Policy Questions

1. What has research focusing on so-called “policy entrepreneurs” contributed to the study of the politics of public policy development. Assess the strengths and weaknesses of this line of inquiry.

2. Compare and contrast the advocacy coalition framework to the punctuated equilibrium framework. Evaluate each framework’s treatment of mobilization, rationality, information, institutions, and policy learning. Based on this evaluation and applications of these frameworks drawn from the literature, identify the theory you think is stronger.

3. Discuss the current state of the literature on interest groups in the policy process. What do we think we know and what questions are left unanswered? What, if anything, can we conclude about taking a singular focus on interest groups as a central force in driving policy stability and change?

Part II: Stages of the Policy Process

1. Theorizing about the agenda-setting stage of the policy process has been the subject of some of the most high-profile scholarship in the public policy field. (a) Drawing upon both classic and the most contemporary work, provide a critical synthesis of theory on agenda-setting. What does your critical synthesis suggest are crucial matters for empirical test?
2. Much of the state policy adoption research is focused on policy diffusion and reinvention models. Explain this approach and describe its major strengths and weakness for understanding policy change at the state level. Also, explain why reinvention studies are important for policy research generally in terms of what they tell us about the policymaking process.

3. Pick two stages of the policy process and explain how social construction has been incorporated into the research on these stages. What are the most important contributions that have been made by the scholarship in these areas?

Part III: National Security and Counterterrorism

1. Compare and contrast two policy theories in terms of their ability to explain counterterrorism policy change following the attacks of September 11, 2001. Which theory provides the better explanation and why?

2. From a policy typology perspective how would you characterize counterterrorism policy in the U.S.? Why? Would the policy type in the U.S. be comparable to counterterrorism policy in other countries? Why or why not?

3. How has the theoretical work and research on terrorism and counterterrorism evolved in the past ten years? What are the strengths and weaknesses of terrorism research? What larger theoretical questions remain unanswered?